

**CRAD KILODNEY**

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**mental cases**



*Autograph*

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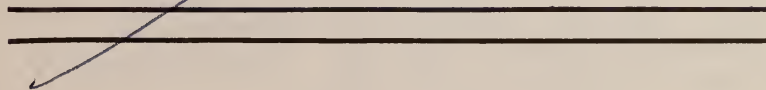
# mental cases

FICTION BY

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*prod.*



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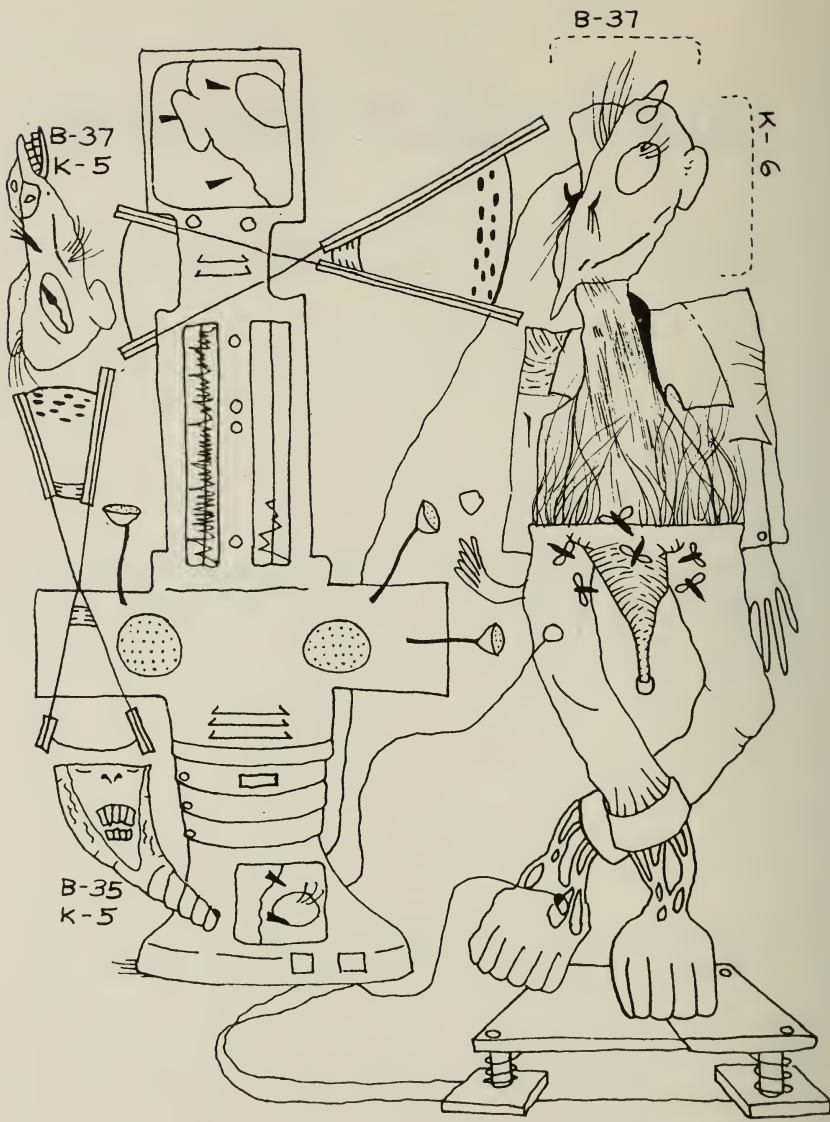
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## THE DISCOVERY OF BISMUTH

(Bismuth, from the German *wissmuth*, or white mass; most metallic member of its family, which includes nitrogen, phosphorus, arsenic, antimony, and bismuth. It melts at 271° C but forms alloys that melt as low as 47° C; used in electric fuses, solders, and sprinklers. Its salts are used in medicine and cosmetics. -- Hotcha.)

It was a time when sunsets ran fast and rivers glowed bright. It was a time of torment and ecstasy, passion and vice, hope and despair, agony and sloth, mistrust and waste, amiability and procrastination, obstreperousness and confusion, violence and coexistence, nouns and conjunctions -- in short, a time when logic and absurdity danced in a Motown frenzy aboard a ship fated for titanic disaster and a veritable tsunami of unleashed metaphors. In other words, a Thursday.

In such a time of travail did Liz Cerumen pant frantically at her kitchen table, her world torn asunder weekdays at three-thirty. The less-than-meteoric star of *Schoolmarm's Straits* had been novaed against her will and turned into a white dwarf -- written out, kaput, and was about to be written out again. You'll see.

Overhead, a fleet of police planes zoomed helter-skelter, perilously close to the rooftops of this great, sprawling (or burgeoning, perhaps) midwestern metropolis, searching, observing, graphing. But they were not noticed by Eleanor, the pretty thirty-three and a half year old housewife, who sat at the kitchen table peeling rutabagas with reckless abandon.

She had tried to be faithful, but vice now held her in its grip. Life with The Oat had lost its alpen flavor. She thought back to the one she might have married. Yes, Sydney had become a success. He now owned a lucrative chain of El Syd's Teeno Latino Earth Underwear stores. But it was too late. Syd was gone.

After marrying The Oat, months passed like boring subway stations. Migrating birds went back and forth across her window. Then HE came into her life. It had happened so casually. She had gone to the Washday Problems Center to find out if anything would get out chromoplasm. There she was, at the end of the line for Qualitative Analysis -- and then a flash of blue eyes, a flutter of excitement, an

adrenalin chill, and it was an accomplished fait accompli thing. She knew it. So did he. Bob would never understand. Neither would Jill.

Rutabaga husks were flung off in pained parabolas of anticipation as she looked at the clock. The handsome metallurgist would be here soon. The Oat would not be back till who knew when.

It was just like in *Schoolmarm's Straits*, thought Eleanor, but things like that *did* happen, and when you were in someone's nice story, moonbeams would wax and wane through the window and stars would speak to you, and then it was, oh, so sublime. Yes, she knew that when the cuckoo came out of the clock and asked for the public mandate for another hour, the famed pharmacologist would be here. She would look upon him with Mallomar-soft eyes, and he would dive straight through her windows open on the virgin forests of her mind as if falling through a fantastic country of late medieval blues and greens, coming at last to rest upon a lawn beside a fountain where a young girl in a white dress trimmed with pearls cradled in her lap the horned head of the lascivious unicorn without knowing what he represented. Teenagers in love knew this feeling well.

(Yet how could she have known that the 83rd element of the periodic table, chiefly found native in metaliferous veins associated with silver and cobalt, and which is also used in type metal, as I forgot to mention before, would be so pivotal in a tragedy that would be remembered throughout that small New England town long after *Schoolmarm's Straits* was but a slightly out-of-kilter neuron in the deep mausoleum of memory beneath the cerebral linoleum to which all flesh is heir?)

It seemed as though eons of time passed in Eleanor's mind before the doorbell rang.

'Good afternoon, ma'am. I'm selling lawn niggers.'

'What?'

'Lawn niggers.' He held one up. 'Looks great, huh?'

'I don't want any.'

'Flamingoes? I got flamingoes?' He held one up.

'No, thank you.' She began to close the door.

'Wait! Wait! Wait! Just one more try, eh? Wait'll you see what I got.' He thrust his wrist toward her face.

'Star-Man watches.'

'I don't need a watch.'

'But this isn't a watch for telling time. It lets you

do three things -- fly through the air, detect radioactivity and speak Polish.'

'No, thank you.'

'I suppose you can already do those things, huh?'

'I beg your pardon?'

'Fly through the air and detect radio-activity and speak Polish.'

'You must be joking. I'm sorry, I'm busy.' She closed the door, but he slipped something under it. It was a ticket to the new hit play, *Italian Frankenstein*, starring Tony Orlando and the late George Zucco.

Where was the famed toxicologist? Eleanor paced the floor, then turned on the TV . . .

'Before the end of the twentieth century, the scientists of Japan had succeeded in capturing all of the world's monsters and placing them on an island called Monster Land. There was Godzilla . . . Rodan . . . Yog . . . Mothra . . . Gamera . . . and Granola . . . The monsters were very happy there, for they had lots of food to eat, and the scientists could study them from an underground laboratory . . .'

Then it happened! Cities crumbled! Men ran! Women fainted! Terror reigned! Epidemics spread like plagues! All this and three commercials for Klorg, the Wonder Facial For Today's With-it Pygmy Woman, came to pass before the late oxide hunter arrived.

'Oh!' she cried, 'I was so worried about you, my darling, my love,' and she smothered him with kisses.

'As I was saying on Monday,' he replied, 'I continued my studies with C.W. Push College as a part-time student, and in three years I got my master's degree in chemistry. Then for a year I took special courses in qualitative analysis and spectroscopy, and in five years went to the head of the Washday Problems Center.'

'Oh, Herschel, my everlasting love!' she sobbed.

'I continued studies leading to the Ph.D. degree. It took me eight years of part-time study to do three of the four semesters, owing to the allotment of much of my time to waiting lists. For the past five years I have made no further progress.'

'You're hours overdue! I've been going crazy!'

'My tardiness was entirely due to the untimely passing of my brother, Wilfred, a civil servant assigned to telling stories to lost people in caves. He had no time to get out of the way of the stalagmite that snuffed out his life.'



'I'm so sorry, dear. How old was Wilfred?'

'He was thirty-four -- too young to be killed by a stal-agmite.'

While Eleanor wishfully hoped hopefully somehow, something, somewhere would effect a change in Herschel, she noticed his head jerk spastically and his fingers fold into a tight clench as his body stiffened. Herschel's eyes rolled back, then settled in the sagging lower lids as glossy black coals in a blazing fire. With a peculiar twist, he pursed his lips as if to speak, but only a prolonged hiss gargled from his throat, when his mouth drew back distorting his face to a serpent-like grimace, and his nostrils bulged as if laboring for breath in an arctic icy mist. 'Were Pinky Lee and Bruce Lee brothers?'

'Why, no, dear, I don't think so.' Tears hesitated at the interface of her lacrimal gland and whatever is right next to it. After all, she was every much a woman as any. Had hope fled? Every day a thud sounded in front of the house -- the sound of her property values falling. She was thirty-three and a half -- and getting older! And she felt that gnawing hunger that threatened to explode in torrents of hot, wet, frenzied . . .

'As one would guess,' offered Herschel, 'affixtional endings do quite accordingly play an influential part in grammatical evaluation, and like words, much more so within context than out. In the statements *superfrantic renderings propa-gandize lustrous scintillations* or *beeble blooped blip*, a native of the language, for the most part, unconsciously realizes or inadvertently decides the words to be positioned in a correct order, in spite of probable lexical unfamiliarity, by the representations of affixtional signals positioned in a manner familiar to the language.'

The gulp of air, ingurgitated by unexpected surprisal, compressed Herschel's tracheae to effect slight discoloration and the involuntary disruption of his nervous system brought about a sudden profusion of slimy sweat, as well as a writhing from fear of wetting his pants. When Herschel tried to give an explanation to his squirming hot flash, only the faintest squib ejected, so, to offset humiliation, he began reading.

'What's this? A religious tract:

'The colors of the flying saucers depend upon the spiritual mood of the saucer. Spiritual colors are easier to see at high altitudes. Therefore, pilots often see flying saucers. Those who climb high mountains may see them also. To others,

in the valley of the shadow of death, the saucers may appear white, as from alcohol or drugs. The poor saucers are afflicted just as people are. The poor alcoholic gets green men and so does the saucer. When the saucer gets full enough of green men and sick enough it lands, perhaps near a drunk who may be attractive to the devils. The green devils may say, 'Take me to your leader,' and the drunk may say, 'Follow me,' and they do. Or, he may wave his bottle in the air and the green men may attack. Yes, to some of us there are dangers from flying saucers. However, that is not the Christian approach. . .'

His reading was interrupted by Eleanor's ministrations to his feet. 'My darling, are your socks comfortable? I heard on the news about this hospital study on pain other than headache that socks pulling on foot hairs over a long period of time may lead to anti-social behavior, even insanity or violence.'

'Where was this study done?'

'At Canada Packers Institute. Oh, I do worry about you, my love.'

'I'm fine. Really.'

The noted cosmogonist wandered to the window, and down below on the sidewalk behind the enormous high-rise, a conversation was taking place:

'I'M AFRAID TO THINK ABOUT OUR NEXT GENERATION. THERE FUTURE IS VERY BLEAK. I PITY THE GOOD-PARENTS AND THERE OFF-SPRINGS. THE MOB HAS SOMETHING EVIL IN-STORED FOR THEM, BILL.'

'WHAT EVIL THING ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, ROLAND?'

'DRUG'S TO DOPE THE CHILDREN WITH, BILL.'

'DRUG'S?'

'I'M TALKING ABOUT DOPE! IN THE FORM OF DRUG'S, BILL.'

'GOOD-HEAVENS! OUR KID'S MIND WILL TURN THEM INTO A LIVING VEGETABLE. THEY'LL HAVE TO HAVE DRUG-CENTERS ON EVERY STREET TO COPE WITH THIS TERRIBLE HABITUAL-DRUG, ROLAND.'

'I KNOW BILL,' SAID ROLAND RATHER GLOOMY.

'HOW CAN A HUMAN-BEING SINK SO LOW, AS TO DESTROY HIS OR HER OWN LIFE AS WELL AS OTHER HUMAN-BEINGS, WHEN GOD INTENDED A HUMAN-LIFE TO GROW AND TO LIVE, ROLAND.'

'WHAT THE HELL DOES THE MOB CARE ABOUT HUMAN-LIFE? NOR DO THERE FAMILIES, THERE RELATIONS AND ALL THOSE OTHER PARASITES WHO DON'T GIVE A DAM ABOUT YOUR KIDS OR MIND, WHEN THERE KIDS WILL BE THE SELLERS OR PUSHERS IN THE TRAFFIC OF DRUGS, BILL.'

'BROTHER I SURE LEARNED A LOT ABOUT LIFE, CRIME, AND THE MOB JUST WALKING ALONG THIS SIDE-WALK WITH YOU, ROLAND. WHAT LIFE I SAW WAS THROUGH A PAIR OF ROSES-COLORED GLASS'S, ROLAND.'

'I THINK THAT TRUCK IS GOING TO HIT US, BILL.'

Just then the phone rang. It was Caldo Clistere, the famed emcee of *Jackpot Nigger Bingo*, asking if Eleanor could name any five Emory University professors who danced well and loved children, in return for which she would win a sum of money large enough to allow her and Herschel to leave this story and settle in a green pasture. However, she couldn't, so they didn't.

She *might* have looked at Herschel, eyes downcast, soul far away, as if to say, 'You know, you're not helping the editor make sense of this. He's trying to do his job to the best of his ability.'

'Phooey!' Herschel *might* have ejaculated. 'He probably hasn't even gotten this far.'

It would have been true. These very words were not even being read by many loathsome, inadequate and pockmarked editors who came here from other countries to take away the rightful jobs of our citizens in asylums, but they don't know I'm saying all this because they sent it back around the point that the police planes zoomed helter-skelter.

Herschel instead elaborated: 'The seminal causes of Pater's early and constant suspicion of absolutist philosophical systems lie buried somewhere in the obscurity of his formative years at the Haunted Strangler Prep School and in the rational historicism he inherited from Burckhardt and Michelet, which was later confirmed by his reading of Hegel and Darwin. They need not concern us. It is enough to state that after patient study of all philosophical alternatives rehearsed in the quasi-autobiographical *Marius the Epicurian*, Pater admitted the improbability, or at best the incognitivity, of any reality which cannot be proved by empirical verification.'<sup>2</sup>

'Herschel,' Eleanor pleaded, 'listen to me. Did you get your divorce?'

'Yes,' the famed cosmetologist answered. 'Ester had become estranged from me for several years, and I could not bear to live with a strange woman. Of course, she is collecting antimony.'

'You do . . . care for me, don't you, Herschel?'

He regarded her fulsome figure, so rich, palatable and organic. 'Why, yes.'



'Then take me!' she screamed, clutching at his white lab smock. 'Feel my hot, womanly flesh! For eight long years my flesh has known no joy! I would lie awake so many nights in hot flashes and/or cold chills, my hungry body wanting a long, hard plenum! I stayed away from church -- me, a devout Baculite -- because I knew I might confess my sinful state of mind! Eight years, do you hear me? Oh, how could you know when we first met what kind of awful fantasies danced in my mind! But I can't help it, I tell you! I need what only you can give me! Surely, you can understand that as a man of maturity and experience!'

'You are visiting your parents in Cincinnati? I shall be happy to furnish transportation to the airport. I have enjoyed watching airplanes since the age of five years old. The development of air travel has made possible the standard of living and many of the modern comforts we enjoy today.'

Suddenly, there was the sound of feet wiping on the welcome mat outside the front door, and an accompanying whistling of the poignant Wagnerian song, *Ich möchte diese Schuhe putzen lassen*.

'Quick!' she said to the celebrated biophysicist. 'It's my husband! Go out the back door!' She shoved him into the kitchen and out the door, and came back into the living room, trying to regain her composure as The Oat was hanging his cape in the closet. He wore red boots, brown leotards, and matching top with an orange 0 on the chest. The Oat had become pot-bellied with middle-age.

'How was work, dear?' said Eleanor with forced calm.

'Okay,' said The Oat. 'I had to go to Monster Land to save Kimiko and Kazuo. Finished up around 3:30. Boy, these socks are hurting me!' He took off his boots and pulled his socks off, rubbing his hairy feet. 'Say, before I forget, I want you to call the printer tomorrow and tell him the business cards have to be done over. Can't go around handing out cards that say "The Oaf".'

*Make conversation, look natural*, she told herself. 'Um, you missed a nice episode on *Schoolmarm's Straits*.'

'I hate that program. Bunch of idiots. So what happened?'

'Mildred's baby was born in the post office, and she couldn't pay the special delivery charge, so they kept it there and said they'd send it around fourth class, and then -- ' Oh, no! What's that on the floor?

THE DISCOVERY OF BISMUTH

'Uh huh.' He straightened up. Then something caught his eye. 'What's that?' He picked up a lump of metal. Eleanor froze. The Oat examined it, felt its weight, sniffed it, tasted it. 'It's bismuth, isn't it? ISN'T IT? IT'S BISMUTH!'

'No!'

'DON'T LIE TO ME! HE'S BEEN AROUND AGAIN, HASN'T HE?'

She screamed, for a look of insane fury came over him.

'HERE IS A GUN! I SHOOT YOU!' BANG!

'Oh, I die!'

And so a great discovery was paid for in full by the sacrifice of a noble life. Now sprinklers give life to new sod in the suburbs, fuses sustain the air conditioners of Kansas, typesetters prepare these words, and our upset stomachs are quickly relieved. For all these things, dear God, we kneel and give thanks.

1. I'm only kidding. There's no footnote.
2. Uhlan, Edward. *Walter Horatio Pater: Minnow Among the Whales*, Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1975.

IT CAME FROM BENEATH THE SLUSH PILE  
OR  
THE MOUNTAIN ELEPHANTS OF DELAWARE

"Bimbo," remarked Jarks, "would certainly be confused with Bembo." It was moot. Eventually we opted for Elephantine.

But I am ahead of myself.

We were a convention of typographers, meeting in the open air in Corner Ketch, Delaware, for there were few or no buildings. Our shoes stank of manure, for this was Mushroom Country. Mushrooms, as I learned, are cultivated on piles of manure. There is some significance to this ecologically, but I shall not echo logic in any sense--horse, common or otherwise.

Reports had filtered in (as they say on the news) of a herd of elephants in the vicinity, which might well come upon us accidentally and reduce us to thin halftones. Well, we were scared shit.

A kid with shaggy hair from Trenton (the kid himself was from Seattle) pontificated thusly: "Elephants? There ain't no elephants loose out here."

"Smart-ass snot-face kid!" This from my boss, an old timer. "You get a college degree and you think you're a genius right away. WELL LET'S SEE HOW GENIUS YOU ARE IN THE REAL WORLD! When I was your age I could run a Ludlow with my eyes closed!" That was his Gothic period.

My boss was among those who elected to organize a vigilante group to either kill the elephants or chase them away. We discussed this heatedly and then broke for lunch.

I hitched a ride to town (Newark -- pronounced New Ark) with an archetypal woman who said she had never met anyone like me before. Her features and voice were all Mistral. My blood pounded with Bodoni concupiscence. The sun was hot. I estimated its temperature at about 6000 degrees Kelvin. We had a Slurpee at the Dairy Queen, and it was then that she told me.

"I was abandoned by my parents in an old mine shaft not far from here."

"Mine shaft?" I interrupted. "I didn't know there were any mines around here."

"Oh, yes," she said. "In the mountains."

"I didn't know there were any mountains either."

"For Chrissakes! . . . Oh, forget it."

I felt she was trying to tell me something.

"The twelve lost tribes of Israel," she began again.

"Oh, yes, of course," I said. This was getting impossible.

"I was brought up by the *thirteenth* tribe -- the *Elephantines*."

My mind reeled like a web-fed rotary doing 25,000 per. Could the rumors be true?

"If there are rumors, they must be true," she said.

Time grew short. We hopped into her Electra, and she drove me back. I left her with a promise. I forget what it was, but her words rang in my ears: "They must not be destroyed!"

Rejoining the convention, I found the typesetters sitting about on the field. Trays passed from hand to hand, and voices demanded, "Gimme another slug!"

The union's New York local, a militant group calling themselves the Hounds of Baskerville, had decided that the elephants must be destroyed immediately. My boss was their chapter head. I sought him out privately. "Think of what you're doing. These Elephantines, I mean, elephants, could be a blessing in disguise."

"You're nuts. How would you justify that?"

"Look, I met this chick, see. A real Oldstyle from way back. Those elephants aren't elephants at all. They're Israelis!"

"Kid, you're really mixing your fonts. Your lines are running solid. I don't read you."

"Boss, wait a minute! This chick, see, she was orphaned in a mine shaft and brought up by the thirteenth lost mountain tribe, the Elephantines."

This led nowhere.

Would the militants win out or would the state of the art be advanced. *Newsweek* would tell.

The question of camouflage arose . . . somewhere. It hardly matters. It arose like a 6-pt. footnote on a false folio. But this was Delaware, a state with no defining characteristics. In their absence, anything was possible.

Mountains? Who ever saw them?

Corporations? All the biggies were registered in Delaware. It said so on all the stock certificates. But where were they? Amalgamated Nutcracker. Technotronic



Cornbat. 3P. Fixco. G. W. Bridge. C.C.B. Striking.  
A.Y.N.I. Love.

And, of course, Du Pont. He could hide anything.  
Hidden Israelis. Mountains. Delaware.

Something . . .

Wait a minute.

It was as screwy as the lower loop on a Cheltenham  
"g." I took a slug of Pabst Extrabold and mused. Storm  
clouds gathered on schedule. Everything was like pregnant  
with possibility. The air was electric. The wind swayed  
the trees. All that stuff.

And then on the horizon we saw them. Shapes. Out-  
lines. Big things moving toward us. They looked like . . .

"Galloping Garamond!" Jarks yelled. "The Mountains  
Elephants of Delaware!"

We all looked at him. "You do have a rather clumsy  
way of setting subtitles," I said.

Back to the point of things. My skin was all intaglio  
with goosebumps. The elephants must be allergenic! I hid  
behind a manure pile adorned with inky caps.

There was lots of screaming and hollering and running.

"AIEEEYEEEEAA!"

"ARRRGHH!"

"YOWWWWEEYEE!"

THUD. THUD. THUD.

In a split second my whole apprenticeship flashed be-  
fore my eyes. Bulmer. Caledonia. Janson. Scotch Roman.  
Granjon. Caslon #2. Egmont. Waverly. Primer. Century  
Schoolbook Bold. Notches and mortises, alive, alive Oh!

Before we knew it, or slightly after, the elephants  
were upon us and stopped. There were men on top of them.  
Old men. And women and children. Whole families with  
bundles of things. They all looked pained, bored and tired.  
One of the men called out, "Hey, any of you guys know how  
to get off one of these things?"

And so we showed them how to dismount -- always on  
a new recto tusk. A good guess.

Their trek was over. Three thousand years on ele-  
phants. Their children had never set foot on the ground.  
Whole communities were born, flourished and died, never  
knowing the joys of bowling, of Buicks, of welfare.  
This called for something special.

"This calls for something special," I said cryptically, going over to the lead pachyderm. And as I rubbed my hands over its skin, I saw in the wrinkles the inspiration for a whole new series of type faces. Entire alphabets could be found on a single thigh. I thought of Bimbo, which Jarks said would be confused with Bembo. And so we made Elephantine and Elephantine Bold, Expanded, Oblique and yes, Italic.

But soon it was time for our nomadic friends to leave. "Which way to Wilmington?" they asked. We pointed northeast, so they turned toward the southwest. "Back to the mountains," the leader announced.

Which reminded me. "I was meaning to ask you. How come no one ever sees those mountains?"

The leader turned his Weiss Roman face to me. "Move them around all the time. You tell the mountain to move, and it moves! Boy, those goys sure knew some tricks! . . . HI YO, BIMBO, AWAY!"

And with that, they galloped away as the rain began to fall, washing away the last print. All of us knew we were at the end of the last signature. Time to fold, gather and sew, which was not our job, so we left Corner Ketch before the binders arrived, never returned and don't plan to.



## TELEOLOGICAL -- WITH CHICKEN MEAT

### LARRY NORTON'S RECOLLECTION

I was up from Tidewater only two weeks. It was really a thrill, something I was hoping for for a long time. You know, rubbing shoulders with Seaver and Jones and Harrelson and the rest of those guys. I didn't really expect to play regular, but then Boswell got sick and I got into the line-up. It was really swell, you know? I was kind of nervous and all. It seemed like there was a million people in the stands and there I was standing at the plate facing Ferguson Jenkins. It was the bottom of the fifth and we were down six to nothing already. I'd been keeping my eyes on the sky for about the past inning or so. It looked pretty dark and I thought sure the rain would start coming down any second. I was up with two outs and all I could think of was stalling around, rubbing my hands with dirt and all that. I was praying so hard for it to rain before the inning was over, you know? I kept thinking, RAIN! RAIN! RAIN! so hard I thought my head would break open. I was afraid to even swing at the ball. Jenkins had me two and two, and he was in a hurry to get one more by me.

Just then there was a tremendous roar of thunder right over us. Any second, I thought. It's really going to pour any second. Jenkins went into his wind-up and it was right then that it hit him on the head and he stopped. Then it was coming down all over us, all the whole stadium. Some kind of white shreds. I looked at a piece and then picked it up. It was chicken meat.

### BOB AND LINDSEY

"Lindsey, it looks like something's falling from the sky . . . I . . . I've never seen anything . . . What does it look like to you, Lindsey?"

"I, uh, I'm not sure, Bob. I know our TV viewers must be as curious as we are. The fans seem rather amused by whatever it is."

"Play appears to have stopped, sports fans. Uh, there is something falling all over us. It looks like cotton or something, I'm not sure."

TELEOLOGICAL -- WITH CHICKEN MEAT

"It's falling straight down, Bob, so I don't think it could be cotton."

"No, I didn't think it was. I only said it looked like it . . . The players are picking it up and they're all shaking their heads. Ron Santo is talking to the third base umpire . . . Now he's running into the dugout . . . We're trying to get some word from the field on this. Lindsey?" (A long pause during which barely audible whispers are heard.) "Uh, we'll be back right after this word from our sponsors, sports fans . . . *Did you say chick --* "

*AERIAL CHECK BY UMPIRES*

"Do you see a plane or anything?"

"No, I don't. Do you think a plane's dropping it?"

"What else? You don't think chicken meat would just fall out of the sky, do you? It's some kind of joke."

"Could be, but I don't see how they could do it.

The stuff is coming straight down all over the field, that's the funny part of it. Besides, who'd be crazy enough to fly through that kind of thunderhead?"

"Well, what do you think then?"

"I don't know what to think. I just wish it would stop."

*CONDITION OF CHICKEN MEAT*

Broiled. Edibility unverified for first 26 minutes of fall until sample eaten by W. Montford, New Hyde Park. Absence of dark meat noted.

*FALL CONFINED TO THE ACTUAL AREA OF SHEA STADIUM*

The fall was confined to the actual area of Shea Stadium.\*

---

\*Parking lots included. Air vents of several cars clogged.

FORTEAN EVENTS -- AN INTRODUCTION

Fortean events have been known for centuries and have been interpreted in various ways, but never satisfactorily explained. They comprise a wide variety of phenomena.

Anomalous precipitations have been a recurrent type:

Devonshire, England, 1837 -- a large number of black worms three-quarters of an inch in length fell in a snow-storm.

Vicksburg, Miss., 1894 -- a small piece of alabaster fell in a hailstorm.

Glamorganshire, Wales, 1859 -- a large number of small fish, still alive, fell from the sky.

Sart, France, 1901 -- a rain of glue-like substance.

Chico, Calif., 1922 -- a shower of warm rocks.

Worcester, England, 1881 -- tons of periwinkle fell in a violent thunderstorm.

Port Isabel, Texas, 1888 -- a shower of nails on two successive nights.

Walterboro, S.C., 1886 -- a shower of small shot.

Castlecommon, Ireland, 1887 -- thick, black rain.

Blankenberge, Holland, 1819 -- red rain.

Cochin, China, 1887 -- a shower of a substance resembling blood, somewhat coagulated.

In Fortean thinking, the universe is perceived as organic, multi-dimensional and teleological. It is also non-metaphysical and largely discoverable by empirical methods. However, the non-acceptance of Fortean hypotheses is due to exclusionism by orthodox science of Fortean events, which cannot be assimilated into the orthodox framework of thought.\*

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\* That such has occurred is explained by Kuhn's thesis, in which scientific research follows a three-stage pattern: 1) a period of largely random and uncoordinated theorizing, unified only by a "family resemblance" among a general range of phenomena, 2) the establishment of a paradigm, or pattern, defining basic beliefs that guide and limit investigation, leading to a dogma, and 3) basic discoveries resulting when research and data fail to reinforce the

TODAY'S BASEBALL QUIZ

Who was the last Philadelphia Phillies player to be the National League's Most Valuable Player?

TWO THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS CONSIDERED

- A. "Harvey, this isn't the end of the world, is it?"  
"Nah, what's three games out of first place? There's plenty of time to catch up."
- B. The word "manna" popularly connotes a miraculous "bread from Heaven." Biblical manna is believed to be a lichen -- *Lecanora esculenta*, perhaps, a plant akin to reindeer moss. Manna that is used for food even today derives from any of a number plants. In religious literature, it may even include birds.

DESTRUCTION OF THE STADIUM FORETOLD

And Jessie Fleishman, and old embittered Dodger fan, took his Little Leaguers to Flushing to show them the stadium.

And Jessie said to them, "You see this? I swear to you by the spirit of Ebbets Field that this stadium shall be cursed and none shall ever play in it again."

And as he sat on the tailgate of his station wagon, his team gathered around him, asking, "When, Jessie?"

And Jessie answered, "Don't let anyone fool you. No one can guess the exact day, but there'll be all kinds of rotten stuff happening. It'll serve these hypocrites right."

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paradigm. Underlying this thesis is the conviction that the bulk of scientific activity is aimed at establishing the old paradigm and is affected by historical circumstances. Therefore, it is prone to exclusionism. In this frame of thought, Fort's hypotheses may be seen to have passed through all three stages and returned full circle to stage one, with perhaps the most rudimentary formulations of a paradigm.



*THE WHITENESS OF THE CHICKEN MEAT (Told by Sportscaster  
Ishmael Cosell)*

What the chicken meat meant to me is difficult to express. That such material should fall from the sky is pre-eminently appalling, an inexplicable event. Yet, I cannot help but feel that it was the very whiteness of the chicken meat that elicited within my soul a vague horror beyond measure.

Why should this be? Do we not consider whiteness a symbol of virtue, good and beauty? Consider the alabaster sculptures of great artists, the ruins of ancient cities, the raiment of Christ in paintings, or a snow-covered earth at Christmas reflecting the soft light of a full moon.

Yet for all these qualities, there seems to lurk another, diametrically opposed -- one of evil. Witness the polar bear, or the white shark or the albatross, a herald of bad luck. In these, the whiteness only serves to intensify the malevolent associations, as if to suggest that these creatures derive their power from a supernatural source.

So it was then with the chicken meat. The whiteness, which contrasted dramatically to the observer's eye with the blackness of the storm clouds from which it fell, seemed to transfix me as well as most of the spectators after a while. Indeed, most had not the presence of mind to put up umbrellas or seek shelter beneath the overhang of the mezzanine. It was as if we were witnessing an act guided by an intelligent, but hostile force, against which defense would have been futile.

*EFFECT ON ORGANIST NOTED*

Jane Jarvis tried to amuse the crowd with "Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head," but somehow her uneasy spirit was unwilling to make such affectations. Perhaps this was one of the signs in the heavens that presaged the Armageddon. If so, she would face the end at her organ and with it translate the unspeakable bleak and mysterious musings of her soul into music. So it was that 47,000 people allowed chicken meat to rain upon their heads as they listened to Franck's *Fantaisie in A Major*.

MEANWHILE, IN THE TV BOOTH

"Folks, we're talking to Mr. Elmer Yarg, an old-time colleague of Bob and myself, during this, uh, delay . . . Elmer, remember those days in the International League?"

"What?"

"I said, remember those days in the International League?"

Elmer stared at the white dots on Lindsey's tie, which seemed to quiver like snowflakes against a streetlight.

"I, uh . . . don't remember off hand," was his monotone response.

MRS. FENWICK FROM BAYSIDE'S IRRITATION

"I've had enough of this, Charlie. Let's go home."

"The game hasn't been called off yet, Marion. Maybe this'll stop and they'll finish."

"I don't care. I'm worried about Mother. She's all by herself."

"What's to worry? She'll be okay."

*"I don't care. Let's go."*

Charlie sat quietly. There's nothing to worry about. They could be happy right here. Free food falling out of the sky, plenty of beer vendors, even bathrooms. Actually, they could stay forever or until the end of the season, whichever came first.

"Are you coming or am I going to have to go home by myself?"

"Marion . . . please," said Charlie with exaggerated calmness. "There is . . . nothing . . . to worry about."

*"Are you crazy? Look at this! You call this normal?"*

"No, I . . ."

"It's not good, whatever it is, and we'd better get back home. For the last time, will you get up?"

Her husband did not answer, but sat pensively even as a piece of chicken fell on his head.

"Then I'm leaving alone." She gathered her windbreaker and handbag in a flurry of motion and suddenly stopped.

Her husband looked at her. "I thought you were going."

"I . . . I can't move! I'm trying to move and I can't."

Charlie turned his eyes back to the field, where the tarpaulin had been laid down for lack of any better strategy. "Of course not," he said. "Nobody can. Nobody wants to leave."



"What do you mean, nobody wants to leave?" she said, alarmed.

"Subconsciously we want to stay."

"What?"

"The collective subconscious. We're all part of it, so we can't leave because it doesn't want us to leave."

"Why not?"

Charlie paused for a moment. "I'm not sure . . . It's . . . it's like part of us is controlling all the other parts. I don't know."

"Charlie, we'll starve!"

He smiled as a mathematician might at the logic of a theorem. "Hold out your hands."

RADIO BULLETIN

"And now, this late word . . . At Shea Stadium, the Mets baseball game with the Cubs has been delayed by -- *get this, folks -- a shower of chicken meat.* (Laughter in background.) Several eye-witness reports of the phenomenon were just phoned in to us by sports writers at the scene. (More laughter.) The chicken meat has been falling in white shreds of uniform size and in a cooked condition. There have been severe thunderstorms scattered about the metropolitan area, but only at the stadium has the chicken meat been falling. The Police Dept. has stated there is no emergency and no cause for alarm, but neither they nor the weather bureau have any explanation for these *fowl* goings-on. (High-pitched outburst of laughter.)

"Now a word from Farrago Premium Margarine . . ."  
(Allegro moderato)

"Far-ra-go

Far-ra-go

Farrago Premi-yum-yum-yum,

It's so good in your tummy-tum-tum,

It's good on bread, especially toast,

In recipes it is the most

Delicious and nutritious, too,

Farrago is the one for you.

It's good when you're up,

It's good when you're down,

It will make you smile, but never frown,

TELEOLOGICAL -- WITH CHICKEN MEAT

So when you shop, don't mess around,  
Get the one that's world renowned --  
Far-ra-go  
Far-ra-go  
Farrago Premi-yummmm."

*SOLILOQUY OF A HOT DOG VENDOR*

I remember times that I was dreaming and I could watch myself like from some detached vantage point, like watching an old movie on TV on a channel with bad reception. I had that same feeling watching the chicken fall, covering the field like a white carpet, as if God were throwing up. Most everything was quiet like in a church, except for a few babies crying. And the stuff just kept dropping in whooshes and plops. I sat down in an aisle and leaned my head on the hot dog box and closed my eyes. But it was like I had X-ray eyes and could still see everything. Strange things popped into my mind, like bodies rising from graves and a ticket seller dying as punishment for not selling out his section. Maybe other planets were trying to communicate and why didn't they consider something like this in the comic books? I knew I would never sell another hot dog and some one else would have to replace me. The chicken meat would crush flower beds and suffocate babies left outside in their carriages, and ambulances on the way to the hospital would skid and crash. I was glad it was happening, I really was. The whole world was going to change, like people must have thought when they went to see a weeping madonna or when those guys landed on the moon. All around the world people's souls would leave their bodies and they could stop eating or drinking or worrying about being shot. They should bring all the criminals here and let them see this. That would be something.

*PROGRESSION ALONG A VERTICAL VECTOR*

One inch, then two inches. A foot. The level of the meat rose higher. One row after another was lost from view. Mercifully, those in the seats fell into a deep trance before being asphyxiated. The entire lower deck was lost in one hour and twenty minutes. The mezzanine followed within another hour as the shower accelerated. The loge and upper deck seemed oblivious. Even Jane Jarvis went on playing soulful works by dead geniuses and melodies

that entered her head from some unknown source. The stadium's face was white and strange-smelling in the breeze. The scores on the scoreboard were submerged one by one and starting pitchers and their relievers in both leagues fell quietly dead on fields all around the country. An Air Force helicopter clattered loudly above the stadium for a minute, then flew away. Ringing phones in the press box went unanswered and finally stopped. All was quiet as death save for the plopping of the chicken meat and the flapping of the flag, flicking north, then east, then northeast, barely five feet above the level of the tide when the shower finally ceased.

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*ANSWER TO BASEBALL QUIZ*

Jim Konstanty -- 1950.

## THE LAST SECRETS OF OMEGA

As an old man in overalls left the back room of the general store, the mayor, who sat at the table with a notebook in front of him, exchanged a half-smile with his assistant, a former deputy sheriff who had been out of work for a long time. The room was hot and dusty, the floor unswept. The shelves of goods were thick with dust. The light from the unshaded bulb was supplemented by a shaft of late afternoon light that poured through the little window and very slowly crept up the wall. "Bring in the next one," said the mayor, who actually had not been mayor for some years, as the town had shrunk to such a meager population that it had long ago dispensed with any form of civil administration.

The assistant, a middle-aged man in a sport shirt and white trousers, opened the door and said, "Billy, you wanna go next?"

A tall, skinny fellow with bad skin came in and planted himself before the mayor. The mayor turned a page of the notebook, a black and white marble-design composition book. "Okay, Billy, what's your secret?"

"Ahem, well . . ." He looked at the assistant, then back at the mayor.

"Don't be shy, Billy. Come on, spill it."

"I had a dog's head in a bucket under my bed . . . for nearly a week!"

The mayor wrote in the notebook with an ordinary ball point pen. "Well, what else can you tell me about it?"

"Well, Hank, I know it sounds dumb, but see, I was gonna teach myself about brains -- animal brains -- and I mentioned it to this guy from Pie Town who stopped here for gas, and he says, 'Why, I passed a dead dog a mile or so out of town. I'll go back and get it for you.' Well, I didn't see him the rest of the day, and I figured he was kidding, but the next day, I find this dead dog by the front door wrapped in some newspaper. Well, like I said, I was just interested in brains. I figured I'd learn about the other parts later. You know, the brain really is what controls . . . ."

"Yes, yes, just skip that and stick to the facts."

"Okay, well, I didn't need nothing but the head, so I cut it off and buried the rest in the field. Well, now, I was going to get to work on it right away, but I had to go to Las Cruces all of a sudden and I didn't get back for nearly a week. Before I went, I put the dog head in a bucket under the bed for safe keeping." He stopped and looked at the mayor.

"Well?"

"Well, what?"

"What did you do then . . . . I mean, when you got back?"

"Hell, it smelled so bad I threw it out and buried it too. I guess I wasn't cut out for studying animal brains."

The mayor wrote quickly. "When did this happen, by the way?"

"A couple of years ago."

The mayor made a note. "Is that it?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Okay, thanks, Billy. Do you know where to go now?"

"Yeah, out to that there thing," he said, gesturing toward the south.

The mayor nodded. The assistant opened the door for Billy and let him out. "Ready for the next one?" he asked the mayor, who rubbed his eyes.

"Yeah, okay."

The assistant summoned a fat bald man of about sixty who had a strange twinkle in his eyes. "Hiya, I'm all ready!"

"Okay, Lewis, what's your secret?" asked the mayor, pen poised over a fresh page.

"First of all, my name's not really Lewis, it's Ludwig. I'm Ludwig, the Kraut Cowboy."

"What?"

"I became Ludwig, the Kraut Cowboy, during the war. When I turned on my radio a certain way, I got messages from Hitler in code, so I figured I ought to represent the Third Reich here in New Mexico, and maybe Hitler would make me governor." Ludwig seemed to look off into the distance, and a nostalgia crept into his voice. "Late at night, I'd take all my clothes off and put on my cowboy hat and six shooter and go running through the fields



because I was Ludwig, the Kraut Cowboy. I would sing this song I made up." And Ludwig sang with surprising softness:

I'm Ludwig  
The Kraut Cowboy  
Running o'er the plains  
I'll blow out your brains  
Oh, Ludwig, yes, Ludwig  
Ludwig, the Kraut Cowboy  
Friend of the Nazis  
They've got lots of moxie  
They've got a friend in Ludwig  
Yes they do, yes they do  
And so have you, so have you  
If you'll be a Nazi too, a Nazi too . . .

The mayor looked at his assistant. "Do you suppose I have to write all that down?"

The assistant shrugged. "I dunno. I guess so."

"All right." The mayor wrote it down with Ludwig's help. "Okay, anything else you want to add?"

"Hitler asked me to rob a stage coach, but I didn't know where to find one."

The mayor nodded. "All right, Lewis, er, Ludwig. You know where to go?"

"Yeah, I know," said Ludwig. He smiled at the two of them and left the room.

The mayor shook his right hand, which was beginning to get cramped. "Who's next?"

"Alex."

"All right, get him in here."

The assistant poked his head out of the door. "Alex?" he called.

A moment later a teenager walked in, a very ordinary looking boy with somewhat long hair. He had his hands in his pockets. "Okay, now let me get this straight," he said. "You can't do nothing to me no matter what my secret is, right?"

"That's right," said the mayor, looking serious.

"Okay." Alex took a deep breath. "I'm the one who knocked up Phyllis."



The mayor stood up, lips compressed with anger.  
"What? You?"

"Yeah," said Alex, taking a step back instinctively.

The other man put his hand on the mayor's shoulder.  
"Take it easy. There's nothing you can do. Just write it down and get it over with."

The mayor sat down slowly, scribbled two lines under Alex's name and, without looking at the boy, asked, "Is that it, Alex?"

"Yeah. That's it. Can I go now?"

"Yes."

Alex was let out of the room. The assistant gestured to another person waiting in the sad-looking store. Mr. Munger, the old school teacher, was brought in. He stood before the table, shaking with tension.

"All right, Munger, tell me your secret." Munger opened his mouth but seemed paralyzed. "Come on, man, it's all right."

Munger's eyes opened wildly, he stared at the mayor, and blurted out, "BITE MY NOSE!" Then he covered his face with his hands and began sobbing.

The mayor and his assistant looked at each other in amazement. "I don't quite get you," the mayor said to the old teacher.

"I . . . I . . . I've had this impulse as long as I can remember . . . to say to somebody, 'Bite my nose!' but I've been fighting it all along. I fought it with my students. I fought it with visitors, with strangers on the street. I almost said it at a wedding when the minister asked if there was anyone who knew any reason why the couple should not be married, you know, like they always say. And once in a bookstore, I was standing next to this fellow. I turned to him and actually said, 'Bite!' and then I said, 'BUY this book! It's good!' and I picked up a book so he would think that's what I said."

The mayor's pen raced across the page. "It's okay, Munger. It's okay. I hope you feel better now!"

"Yes," he said, sniffing. "I'm glad I got it off my chest. Do I go out to that thing now?"

"Yes."

"It won't be a long wait, will it?"

"No, no. We're almost done."

Munger was let out. A tiny lady was brought in. She had dyed red hair and wore atrociously ornate glasses with phoney jewels in the rims. She was toting a plastic shopping bag almost full of *Reader's Digests*. "Well, Hank," she said, "I'm sure glad to tell somebody this secret. Been saving it up a long time."

"Yes, Selma, I'm sure." He flipped the page. "All right, tell me."

Well," said Selma, "for ten years I been trying to track down the Anti-Christ. I knew he was alive on earth somewhere, so I figured I'd just start from here and work my way around until I checked everybody. I did Pie Town and Quemado first, then worked the towns along 60 and then up to Albuquerque. Well, I was a long time checking out Albuquerque, but I found the bugger, all right!"

"You did, eh?" said the mayor.

"Sure did. The Anti-Christ is living in Albuquerque. His name is Ed Harris, and he works behind the counter at Howard Johnson's."

"Now, hold it, Selma," said the mayor, putting down his pen. "This is even dumber than the last thing you were . . ."

"Dumb to you maybe." She wagged her finger at him. "But I got an intuition for these things, and I helped the good Lord out by finding his enemy, the Anti-Christ. Now you just write it down, Hank, because that's my secret whether you believe it or not, and it's something they will surely want to know!"

The mayor wrote it all down, and let out a deep breath. He was getting tired. The sun was now shining behind his head, which cast a shadow on the wall. Selma waited to make sure he spelled the Anti-Christ's name correctly.

After her departure, the mayor's assistant brought in a grizzled, unshaven desert rat dressed in grimy overalls and a dingy woolen undershirt. "Howdy! Heh, guess I'm the last one! Last but not least, as they say!" He stroked his whiskers casually, examined his dirty nails, and looked at his dusty shoes.

"Okay, Chobey," said the mayor. "Let's get this over with."

"Heh, heh! In a hurry, aincha? Heh, heh! Well . . ."

He spat a little piece of tobacco off the end of his tongue. "A good thing is worth waitin' fer, as they say."

"Yes, and I'm still waiting," said the mayor, shifting on his chair.

"Okay, here goes. Well, some years back, when my brudders was all livin' -- Phil and Bentley you remember, I'm sure; Lester was before your time -- well, we all got innarested in cannibalism . . ."

"In what?"

"Cannibalism."

"Oh, I thought you said capitalism." The mayor continued writing.

"Hell no. Cannibalism. Lester joined this book club, you know, where they send ya one a month, and all that. Well, the first book he got was on cannibals, and we all read it and we was always talkin' about it. He wanted to git some more, but the book club said that was the only one they had. So he cancelled them . . ."

"Can you stick to the important stuff, please?"

"Sure, well, we all read this book, and one day Lester says at the dinner table, 'I wonder what it's like to eat somebody.' And Phil and Bentley said they wondered about it too. Well, it was just talk, you know, but it seemed that's what we talked about every night at dinner. Then one night, Lester says, 'You know, we should do it.' And I says, 'Do what?' And he says, 'Eat somebody!'" The mayor and his assistant both grew agitated. Chobey went on. "Well, we had to figger how we was gonna do it, see. I mean, we just couldn't go grab somebody and eat him, because he might be missed." Chobey stopped to pick another tobacco speck off his tongue. "So then one Sunday when we was all in the house, this salesman comes knockin' on the door. It was the first time we could ever remember a salesman comin' to see us. We ain't exactly on the beaten path, as they say."

"Yes, yes, get on with it," said the mayor, clenching his pen.

"Sure, sure," said Chobey, obviously enjoying himself. "Well, when the salesman excuses himself to go to the privy, Lester says, 'This is our chance,' and I says, 'You mean *him*?' And he says, 'Sure, why not?' Well, Phil and Bentley were all fer it, the rascals, and I went along with it too, seein' as how we was always such a close knit family. So when the guy comes back from the privy, Lester bonks him on the head. Then we ate him."

"YOU ATE HIM? YOU ACTUALLY ATE HIM?" shrieked the mayor, face pale.

"Yes, we did. The four of us."

"YOU ATE HIM RAW? OH, MY . . . ."

"No, no, no! Not *raw*! What do you think we are, crazy? No, we cut him up and cooked him first."

The mayor stared at him, speechless. Chobey stared back, cool as a cactus. The mayor entered the man's secret in the notebook, writing slowly and stopping to correct numerous mistakes.

"Tsk! It's a shame," Chobey mumbled to himself.

"What?"

"I said, it's a shame."

"Then you're sorry about it," said the mayor with a little relief.

"Well, no. It's a shame we ate so little of him. Mostly went to waste. I normally don't believe in that, you know."

The mayor covered his face and swallowed hard. "I think I've heard enough, Chobey. Please leave."

"Sure, sure! I'm finished anyway." He grinned.

"And rarin' to go, as they say." He turned to leave.

"Wait! Just one more thing. I just want to know, just for myself."

"Uh huh?"

"What was he selling?"

"Hell, I don't remember. What does it matter?" And Chobey left the room.

The mayor and his assistant looked at each other.

"Well, Cliff . . . ."

Cliff appeared nervous. "Hm?"

"I saved you for last. I thought it would be easier for you."

"Oh." Cliff watched as the mayor turned the page.

"Well, I . . . I don't know how to say this. It's kinda hard . . ." The mayor looked at him with sympathy. "You always was my friend, Hank. You always thought good of me." A pause. "Hank . . . I'm --"

"Don't say it, Cliff."

"What?"

"You don't have to say it." He put his hand over the



blank page. "It's no secret." He watched his friend's face as it turned red and the eyes avoided his own.

"Ahum . . . Well, then . . . I guess I can just go," he said softly.

"Yes, Cliff."

He turned to go, then stopped. "Aren't you coming?"

"I'll be along. You go on now."

Cliff walked out, leaving the door open.

The sun was setting. The light in the room became orange-red. The mayor sat for a few minutes in thought. Then he picked up the pen and began writing, and as he did so, tears came to his eyes. He wrote quickly and filled three pages without pausing once. Finally he closed the notebook. On the cover in block letters was written "The Last Secrets of Omega." He left the notebook on the table, got up, and went out.

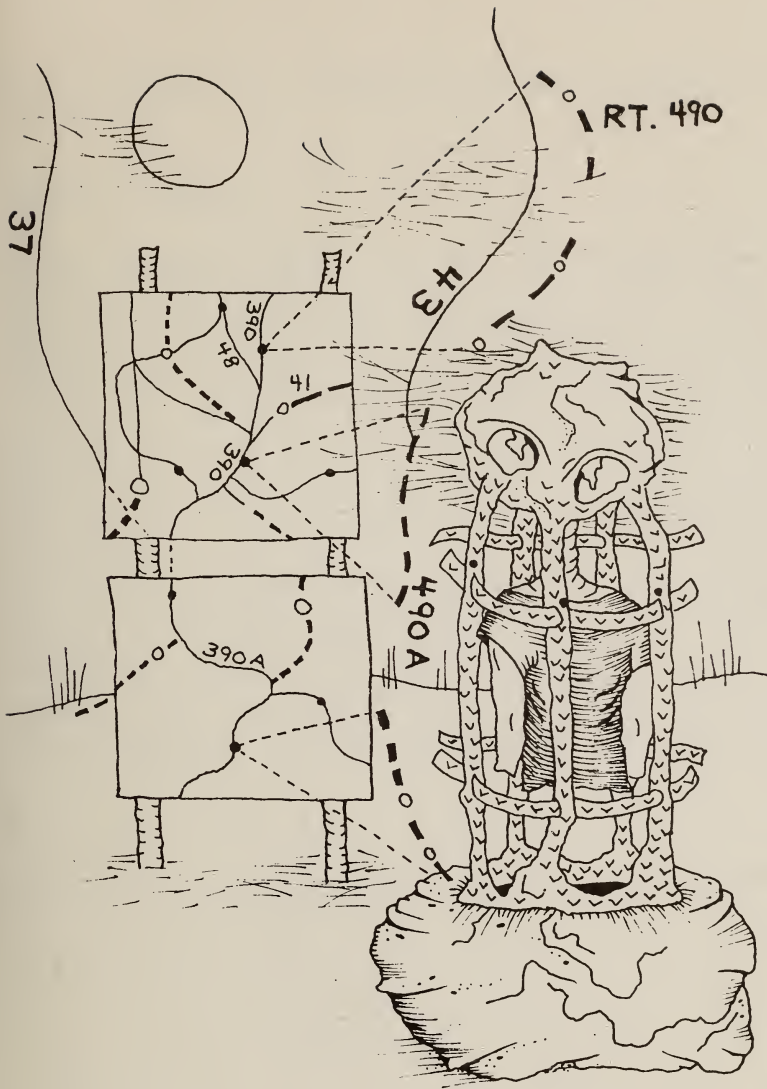
There were a few broken down buildings still clinging sadly to highway 60 -- an abandoned gas station, three or four wooden frame houses, the general store, the old cafe, and the mayor's own hardware store, whose windows were boarded up. A sign hung sideways from a single nail on a wooden post -- "Omega -- Elev. 6,900 ft. Pop. 15."

The poor shrubland of juniper and pinyon was flat all the way to the western horizon. From the north, the Mangas Mountains curled eastward and around toward the south. The southern horizon was punctuated by a smooth, black perfectly cylindrical object the size of a small house, about a mile from the highway.

The mayor took the last cigarette from a pack and lit it. The smoke hung in the still air. He turned toward the south and walked over the rough ground. The occasional car that traveled U.S. 60 would not notice him or even give Omega a second look. A jackrabbit sniffed among some bushes and a lone hawk circled leisurely toward the east. A few wisps of cirrus made variations on a red theme. The air was clear and dry and smelled faintly of the dust. The mayor, hands in pockets, walked slowly, and the sound of his steps carried him like a dream in the deepening twilight.

When he entered the black cylinder, a panel closed behind him.

Then he pulled the switch.







## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Crad Kilodney (psued.) was born in Jamaica, New York, in 1948. He studied astronomy at the University of Michigan and received a B.S. in 1968. After a brief, abortive job as a planetarium lecturer, he abandoned his intended career to become a writer. He worked for two and a half years as an editor for a vanity press, where he became permanently obsessed with the eccentricities of unknown writers and their "contributions" to the English language. In 1973 he migrated to Toronto, where he leads an obscure and solitary life. He supports himself by working in book publishers' warehouses, where he uses his real name and pretends to be an ordinary person. His literary efforts, mostly unpaid, have been seen in more than 25 magazines and anthologies in the U.S., Canada, and England.

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